LEVEL news

Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Water Levels

Volume 5, Number 11 **November 7, 1997**

Dry Weather Over Great Lakes Basin

Lake Levels Decline Significantly During October

Levels of all the Great Lakes went down during the month of October. Lakes Huron, St. Clair and Erie declined by more than usual for the month, while Lakes Superior and Ontario declined by an average amount.

Rainfall during October was below average over the Great Lakes basin. This was the sixth month out of the past seven with near average or below average rainfall, and the drier weather has had an impact on lake levels. At the end of October, Lake Ontario's level was 60 centimetres below the peak it reached this year in May, Lake Erie was 50 centimetres below the peak it reached in early June, Lake Huron was 25 centimetres below it's peak of early July, and Lake Superior was over 20 centimetres below it's peak of July. For all of the lakes, these declines are greater than usual over this period.

Despite the decline in levels, Lakes Huron, St. Clair and Erie were all still about 50 centimetres above average at the end of October. There is a high risk that properties along these lakes could experience extensive damage this fall or winter during a severe storm. Lakes Superior and Ontario were within 10 centimetres of average levels and there is a lower risk of damage to properties along their shores.

New Regulation Plan Get Mixed Reception

Reception to the new Lake Ontario regulation plan has been mixed, judging by discussions at three public meetings held in Burlington, Kingston, and Dorval.

The IJC's International St. Lawrence River Board of Control has recommended that Plan 35P replace Plan 1958-D in regulating the outflows of Lake Ontario. Plan 35P was initially developed in the Levels Reference Study (1993), and since then has been updated by the Board of Control.

Calls for a more diversified range of levels highlighted the Burlington meeting, home to the wetland area of Cootes Paradise. Scientists there said compression of the range of Lake Ontario levels due to regulation has had negative impacts on the ecosystem of wetlands.

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About the monthly Water Level bulletin

October Precipitation Over the Great Lakes

As a percentage of the long-term October average:

Great Lakes Basin	80%
Lake Erie (including Lake St. Clair)	70%
Lake Superior	109%
Lakes Michigan-Huron	73%
Lake Ontario	53%

Note: These figures are preliminary.

October Outflows From the Great Lakes

As a percentage of the long-term October average:

Lake Superior	82%
Lake Erie	119%
Lake Huron	112%
Lake Ontario	121%

Note: These figures are preliminary.

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Summary information for "LEVEL*news*"

The need to take environmental factors in the St. Lawrence River into consideration was also heard at the Dorval meeting. In addition, the Board heard concerns of erosion in the river caused by high Lake Ontario outflows, and that large variations in Lake Ontario outflows have negative impacts on navigation and municipal water supplies.

Recreational boaters everywhere preferred higher levels and a slower decline in the levels in the late summer months. This call was most evident at the Kingston meeting, where recreational boating is an important activity in the Thousand Islands area of the St. Lawrence River.

Shore property owners along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River seem to favour the new regulation plan, since it is expected to slightly reduce the frequency of extreme high or low levels on both Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River.

Three more public meetings are scheduled in the State of New York in early November. The IJC is expected to render its decision following completion of this series of meetings.

El Niño Could Impact Great Lakes

The press is full of stories about the impacts that El Niño may have, or has already had, on our climate. It could also have significant impacts on the Great Lakes.

El Niño occurs when water temperatures in equatorial regions of the Pacific Ocean are above normal, which affects atmospheric patterns and weather in much of the world. This happens every few years, and usually peaks in the late fall and early winter.

Based on past events, it is believed that the Great Lakes area will likely have drier and warmer weather than usual over the next few months. If this should happen, the spring runoff to the Great Lakes would likely be less than average, which could lead to lower lake levels during the spring and summer of 1998.

These conditions could also result in less ice cover over the Great Lakes, which could in turn leave shore areas more exposed to storms and wave action during the winter months.

One study compared storm data from Lake Michigan during previous El Niño years, and found that the strength of storms was greater during those years. That study is suggesting that we could be in for one of the worst storm seasons on record over the Great Lakes. If this is the case, and ice cover is limited, then damage to shore properties could be extensive over the coming months.

Niagara Board Public Meeting

The International Niagara Board of Control held an open house on October 30th in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. A presentation was made on Board and IJC membership, Board duties, Great Lakes levels, ice conditions in the Maid-of-the-Mist Pool this past spring, upgrading of the Lake Erie - Niagara River Ice Boom and the "twinning" of the Peace Bridge. The Board, its associates and five IJC Commissioners discussed these and other items of interest with the

public.

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